

# Work your security plan – if you have one

BY JENNIFER SYSAK

BANG! Something – you’re not sure what – jars your sleepy brain to consciousness. You bundle into clothes you seemingly just took off. The barking cattle dog urges faster action as you shove on cold boots and vault across the darkened yard to the barn. You wonder: “Did that critter get into the feed room again, or is the problem just an old piece of steel (that you’ve been

meaning to nail back down) flapping loudly enough in the wind to get the animals riled?” After all, your farm is secure . . . isn’t it? Events from 9/11 to Hurricane Katrina have caused agricultural producers and pundits alike to stop and re-evaluate concepts of agricultural security and on-farm emergency preparedness. It seems that everyone has advice or an opinion to offer regarding securing agricultural operations against man-made and natural disasters.

During the past several months, Michigan Farm News has featured the Be Aware Be Prepared series of articles. Through it, Farm Bureau Members have had the chance to glean security ideas and learn about new initiatives from the Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan State University Extension and others on readying agribusinesses for the unexpected.

You may have caught yourself asking, “What does emergency preparedness really have to do with me?” You are not alone. In order to serve you better, agencies contributing to the Be Aware Be Prepared series surveyed how producers felt security and safety issues applied on their own situations. Each delegate at the 2005 Michigan Farm Bureau Convention was given a multiple-choice-style survey ranking the importance of security and safety issues to their operations, to determine what Michigan farmers think about this topic.

## The survey:

A post-card bearing the following six statements about farm security was given to delegates at registration. Individuals read the statements and indicated by circling a number (1-5) whether they strongly agreed (1), had no opinion about the statement (3), or strongly disagreed with it (5). Some responders also chose to write short explanations. Tallying

## Governor’s proclamation of ag security month

Whereas, The agriculture and food system is a leading industry in Michigan, directly and indirectly contributing \$60.1 billion in economic activity annually, and accounting for 1.05 million jobs; and,  
Whereas, Michigan’s agricultural sector is vital to the health of our citizens as a provider of safe, secure, affordable, and nutritious foods and to our environment through conservation practices and as a preserver of open space; and,  
Whereas, Michigan farmers face numerous challenges as they seek to meet society’s needs, including not only weather related disasters and increasingly stiff global competition, but also emerging animal and plant diseases and man-made threats ranging from criminal activity to agro-terrorism; and,  
Whereas, Prevention of incidents can be improved through education and training, as well as increased physical security practices like appropriate use of locks, gates, and biosecurity measures; and,  
Whereas, Preparedness, through developing emergency response plans and contact information helps provide for early detection by a trained and ready workforce; and,  
Whereas, Quick and effective response to incidents can help to prevent the spread of diseases, the loss of life, and the reduction of Michigan jobs, as well as minimize the impact on Michigan’s environment; and,  
Whereas, Rapid recovery from agricultural emergencies increasingly requires close coordination of actions with the private sector by officials from all levels of government, as well as university experts; and,  
Whereas, Michigan leaders from both the public and private sectors have worked together to develop numerous useful tools to help improve security and emergency management capabilities in the agricultural sector, including the “Be Aware, Be Prepared” campaign, the “Emergency Planning for the Farm” bulletin, the “Agricultural Security Series” and many others; and now therefore be it,  
Resolved, That I, Jennifer M. Granholm, Governor of the State of Michigan, do hereby proclaim April 2006, as Agricultural Security Month in Michigan.

these survey responses and taking an average gave the following results, which are a cross-section of Michigan farmers’ views on agricultural security.

**Statement 1: I am concerned about my farm being a potential terrorist target.**

**RESPONSE AVERAGE:**  
**3.42 – mild disagreement**

Michigan Farm Bureau delegates indicated that they are not concerned about their farms being terrorist targets. This means that most do not worry about an actual instance of sabotage or intentional harm happening on their farms. However, they are concerned about the far-reaching effects that terrorism elsewhere can have.

**Statement 2: I am concerned that my farm will be impacted by terrorist events in the U.S.**

**RESPONSE AVERAGE:**  
**2.71 – mild agreement**

Several farmers weighing in on this statement indicated through additional written comments that they are concerned about how an off-farm terrorism event may affect their bottom-line activities-such as the marketing and transport of commodities. Everything from fruits and vegetables to grains, milk and

livestock has to make its way to the consumer. Times of heightened national security can significantly slow, or even stop, this process.

**Statement 3: I know the main security and biosecurity threats to my farm.**

**RESPONSE AVERAGE:**  
**2.61 – mild agreement**

Responders indicated that they had some understanding of security and biosecurity threats on their farms. This is important because threats to Michigan’s farming community are not only terrorist acts from abroad. Local threats-like anhydrous ammonia theft-are issues of security with far more potential to disrupt daily farm operations.

**Statement 4: I have a written emergency plan that addresses natural & man-made emergencies.**

**RESPONSE AVERAGE:**  
**3.74 – disagreement to somewhat strong disagreement.**

A majority of those polled admitted to having no formal written emergency response plan. Several individuals even commented that a written emergency plan is something they “should have.”

A documented plan is important, as there is no guarantee that the “right” people will be on

the farm to help when an emergency occurs.

**Statement 5: My employees know what steps to take to protect my farm from intentional attacks.**

**RESPONSE AVERAGE:**  
**3.37 – mild disagreement**

Everyone should see the importance of being able to respond with strong agreement to this statement. Those who work for you are often there when you are not. Remember, theft and vandalism are both “intentional attacks” that really happen. Making sure that those who work for you know how to secure your property can keep your operation from being a target.

**Statement 6: My employees know who to contact to report suspicious activities or circumstances.**

**RESPONSE AVERAGE:**  
**2.59 – general agreement**

This response shows that there is room for improvement. Delegates indicated that employees could be better prepared to respond to suspicious events. Again, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”-and sometimes that pound can be expensive. The extra time spent in teaching employees who to call will be more than worth it in the long run.

## Take home lesson

The task of preparing your farm for the unexpected can be daunting. With all of the demands on your time, where’s the best place to start? With the basics, of course! A written emergency response plan is something everyone can use. That’s the point-it can be as simple as a basic checklist of items to inspect and persons to contact when something on your farm is out of the ordinary. Your veterinarian, Extension office, insurance agent, and even employees can help create this document. Once you have it, keep it handy, posting it in an easily accessible location, and let everyone who works in your operation know it is there. That way, when an emergency arises, those on your farm will have the best tools possible to protect your investments in a timely and responsible manner. Remember, a well-thought-out response plan can make that “BANG” in the night a little less scary-even if it is more than you bargained for.

You may not be as lucky every time as you were that night when you got to the barn and found a raccoon peering from behind a barrel of molasses in the feed room. The next time, it may take more than letting the dog loose to help your farm get back on track. If it does, you won’t have to spend critical time worrying about what comes next-so long as you have a plan.

*Jennifer Sysak is a farmer from Montcalm County who conducted the survey as part of her Masters thesis in food safety at Michigan State University.*

## Ag Security survey Responses

KEY:  
**1**=Strongly Agree, **2**=Somewhat Agree,  
**3**= Neither agree or disagree,  
**4**= Somewhat Disagree, **5**=Strongly disagree

AVERAGE:

### Question 1.

I am concerned about my farm being a potential terrorist target.

→ **3.42**

### Question 2.

I am concerned that my farm will be impacted by terrorist events in the US.

→ **2.71**

### Question 3.

I know the main security and bio-security threats to my farm.

→ **2.61**

### Question 4.

I have a written emergency plan that addresses natural & man-made emergencies.

→ **3.74**

### Question 5.

My employees know what steps to take to protect my farm from intentional attacks.

→ **3.37**

### Question 6.

My employees know who to contact to report suspicious activities or circumstances.

→ **2.59**

## Ag Security Month serves notice to motorists, farmers

BY JILL CORRIN

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm has proclaimed April as Agricultural Security Month in Michigan, and the timing couldn’t be better, according to Craig Anderson, who reminds us that everyone plays a role in agricultural security.

Most Michigan residents associate spring planting with the month of May, but thanks to new technology and seed innovations, farmers can tend to their fields as early as April, said Anderson, manager of the Michigan Farm Bureau’s Regulatory and Compliance Assistance Program.

That means Michigan motorists will soon be sharing roads with slow-moving farm equipment, and they need to be cautious.

One of the biggest hazards is motorists not allowing enough time to brake when approaching a slow-moving farm vehicle. It takes 240 to 300 feet for a car traveling 55 mph, with a normal brake system, to stop behind farm equipment traveling at 10 mph.

“It takes nearly a football field to stop at those levels of speed!” said Anderson. “Drivers need to be aware that the slow-moving vehicle (SMV) emblem – that bright orange triangle framed in red – has meaning and is on that tractor for a reason. It’s a warning to approach with caution.”

Unfortunately, the SMV meaning is lost on many people because of rampant misuse of the emblem. Unlike most official traffic mark-

ers, SMV signs are widely available at retailers, and so are frequently used illegally for marking driveway entrances and other reflective purposes.

The only legal use of an SMV emblem is to mark a vehicle that has a maximum potential speed of 25 mph on the highway, an implement of husbandry, a farm tractor or special mobile equipment.

Improper use of SMV emblems is a violation of section 688 of the Michigan Vehicle Code, and could result in a fine being issued to its abuser.

“If you’re using an SMV sign to mark your driveway, stop the practice immediately,” advised Anderson. “You’ll not only bring yourself in compliance with the law, but you’ll be doing your part to promote traffic safety.”

For their part, farmers should make sure

that all slow-moving farm implements are properly marked with SMV signs and red reflective material on the outboard edges.

“Agricultural producers take responsibility, too. Now’s the time for producers to double-check that they are doing everything in their power to prevent mishaps,” said Anderson.

Motorists are also reminded that farm tractors are likely to have large fuel tanks, and they might be carrying fertilizers and crop protection materials to fields.

“Accidents with farm equipment can lead to substantial cleanup activities as well as serious injury,” he said. “Due to the size of the equipment, the passengers of a vehicle hitting farm equipment are more likely to be injured. It’s our hope that lessons learned in April will be applied year-round,” Anderson said.